DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 347 795 FL 019 465

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TITLE Standards in World Englishes.
PUB DATE 91
NOTE 10p.; In: Tickoo, Makhan L., Ed. Languages & Standards: Issues, Attitudes, Case Studies; see FL 019 461.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *English (Second Language); Foreign Countries; *Intercultural Communication; *Language Standardization
IDENTIFIERS *World English

ABSTRACT

This paper notes that, although the use of English as the primary language of international or cross-cultural communications The discussion focuses on 20 comparisons made between the ethnic and cultural identity has led to a decrease in the number of countries where it is also considered a "national" language. Although the dominance of English in commercial, technical, scientific, and political spheres has led many countries to adopt the language as the means of wider communication with the world, its use in these contexts does not indicate a desire to imitate the culture, philosophy, or lifestyle of native-English speaking countries. It is argued that the use of English in these spheres should not be governed by the phonological, linguistic, or cultural "chauvinism" of native speakers, but that English standards for international or intercultural communications should be based on intelligibility, grammatical acceptability, and social appropriateness. Guidelines for the use of English in cross-cultural communications, both for speaking and listening, are also presented. (JL)

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STANDARDS IN WORLD ENGLISHES*

Larry E. Smith

We are at present witnessing a rapid increase in the use of English as a language of wider communication. It is the language of air traffic controllers at international airports and ship captains at sea all over the world. It is the language used most frequently for international mail and at international conferences. It is the principal language of international commerce and international aid. The geographical spread of English (Kachru, 1987) indicates its rising importance. Often it is claimed that it has reached such importance because of its total number of fluent users (both native and non-native) scattered all over the globe. Sometimes it is said to be so important because it was the language of the industrial revolution and remains the language of science and technology. No doubt two reasons for the high frequency of its use are (1) the power and influence of native English speaking countries, and (2) the fact that much world communication either originates from a native English speaking audience or is directed to such an audience. However I believe a more important reason for the ever increasing high frequency of its use is that non-native speakers are using it more and more often with other non-native speakers in international settings. More and more countries are making English their lingua franca to communicate with the rest of the world--not just the native English speaking world. This is happening at the same time that English is being used less frequently (Harrison, 1979, Aquino, 1988) as a national language because of the desire to reaffirm indigenous cultural identities. The message seems to be, "English is not our national language, but it is one of our official languages for international and intranational use." With the spread of English, many different varieties have developed. The recognition of the functional diversity of English is so important that some (Smith, 1987; Kachru, 1982; Pride, 1982; Strevens, 1987) have begun to use the term Englishes to reflect the functional and formal variations in the language. There is now a professional journal called WORLD ENGLISHES Journal of English as an International and Intranational Language which is devoted to the dissemination of information about English as it is used internationally and intranationally. Not all varieties of English have been described in linguistic texts but they function as varieties nevertheless. Certainly not all of the varieties are used by educated speakers of English, but there is a variety called Standard English (Strevens, 1987) which is a target of use for almost all educated users of the language. The printed form of this variety, at the sentence level, is very similar no matter who the users are or

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what the geographical location. However, the discoursal patterns (i.e., language beyond the sentence which reflects speech acts) within Standard English are very different, depending upon the norms of usage and politeness of the interactors. Of course the spoken form of Standard English has the features of pronunciation, stress, and intonation of the pattern of speech of the locale in which it is used. This paper will deal only with this standard variety of world Englishe as it is used internationally.

When any language becomes international in character, it cannot be bound to any one culture. A Thai doesn't need to sound like an American in order to use English well with a Filipino at an ASEAN meeting. A Japanese doesn't need an appreciation of a British lifestyle in order to use English in his business dealings with a Malaysian. The Chinese do not need a background in Western literature in order to use English effectively as a language for publications of worldwide distribution. The political leaders of France and Germany use English in private political discussions but this doesn't mean that they take on the political attitudes of Americans. It is clear that in these situations there is no attempt for the user to be like a native speaker of English. English is used to express the speaker's business policy, government position, or political conviction. It is the means of expression of the speaker's culture, and not an imitation of the culture of Great Britain, the United States or any other native English speaking country.

English, when used as an international language, is not owned by its native speakers (Suzuki, 1979), and native and non-native speakers everywhere must become aware of the widespread shift in attitudes and assumptions about the language. The shift from a native-speaker dominated to any-speaker oriented attitude toward English is expressed in a statement made by T.T.B. Koh, (quoted in Tongue, 1974) at that time Singapore's representative to the United Nations, ".....when one is abroad, in a bus or train or aeroplane and when one overhears someone speaking, one can immediately say this is someone from Malaysia or Singapore. And I should hope that when I'm speaking abroad my countrymen will have no problem recognizing that I am a Singaporean." Of equal importance in expressing this shift in attitude is a statement by Randolph Quirk (1968) that "notions such as English is the Englishman's gift and the language remains fundamentally 'ours,' etc. are parochial and naive" and that "they do not even remotely correspond to linguistic realities and they can do nothing but harm to the cause of human relationships and international harmony."

International organizations must not only accept this international position for English but must promote it and ensure that their staff and programs are not chauvinistic toward non-native users of English. This doesn't mean "anything goes." Each of us must continue to be concerned with what is appropriate, acceptable, and intelligible. The most basic concern is for intelligibility. If a person doesn't speak clearly enough to be understood, his message is lost. It

should be emphasized here however that the responsibility for effective communication is shared by both the speaker and the listener. In a conversation, it is not the sole responsibility of the speaker to make himself understood. The listener must make an effort to understand. It is fortunate that most speakers are able to attain mutual intelligibility after only a brief exposure to a pronunciation different from their own. (cf. Smith and Rafiqzad, 1979; Smith and Bisazza, 1982; Smith and Nelson, 1985).

The second concern is for grammatical acceptability. It is often easy to understand a person's meaning from what is said even when that person isn't using grammatical sentences (i.e., Standard English). If we hear a person say, "I miss too much my mother," there is little doubt about the meaning but there is some doubt about the person's English education. Strevens (1989) has emphasized that although Standard English can be spoken with any accent, we do not lower our grammatical standards for its use.

The third concern is for appropriateness. One can be easily understood and speak in grammatical sentences and still use English inappropriately. Robert Strauss, formerly the U.S. chief foreign trade negotiator, is known for his down-home, friendly style. While working on the deficit trade negotiations with Japan, Time magazine reports that as the talks were on the verge of breaking down, Strauss slapped the Japanese Minister on the back and laughing said, "You know what? You're crazy hell!" That the negotiations did not collapse on the spot is probably due more to the Japanese Minister's sophistication than to Strauss' rich humor. To say that linguistic chauvinism cannot be tolerated in situations where English is used as an international language does not mean that less emphasis will be given to these three concerns: intelligibility, grammatical acceptability, and social appropriateness.

There is more for native speakers to learn than tolerance for different pronunciation patterns. Native speakers must know how other people structure information and argument when using English. One effective way to learn this, while at the same time learning about other cultures, is to read the "new literatures" written in English by non-native speakers and intended for a world audience. Braj Kachru (1988) has referred to these as "literatures in English." Native speakers must also sharpen their perceptions of what may go wrong in an intercultural conversation. They must recognize the need for talking with the other person about what has gone wrong when there is a communication breakdown. Native speakers must be sensitized to the probability of misunderstanding and be prepared to deal with it.

This is true when a native speaker is talking with a non-native speaker, but it is also true, and equally important, when a native English speaker of one national variety is interacting with another native speaker of another national variety. For example an Australian talking with an American. It is common

knowledge that the majority cultures of the two countries vary greatly from one another even though both use English. The phonological differences may soon be almost forgotten but the way language is used to state cultural assumptions or to structure information will make each one feel like he is working in a "foreign" language. Beyond these differences are those related to ways of speaking. For example the expression of attitudes and emotions through tone of voice, intonation, and gestures. We often hear people say, "It wasn't what she said, it was the way she said it." Americans are said to be assertive, Japanese, very polite, and Thais, shy because of the way they speak.

Although native English speakers will need to change their attitudes and assumptions in shifting toward English as an international language, there are some needed changes for non-native speakers. They too must become more tolerant to the many varieties of educated English and learn about the ways other non-native speakers use English. The Japanese businessman will not be very successful with an Indonesian if he expects him to do business as an American just because he is using English. Sukwiwat (1980) notes that from 1977 the Ministry of Education in Thailand has stated that one objective of studying English in that country is "to promote the understanding of other cultures, with a view to bringing about harmony and friendship among nations." This objective replaced one which read, "to impart an understanding of the culture of the English-speaking peoples." This is a change in objectives non-native speakers must make toward English as an international language.

All people, native as well as non-native English speakers, who use English internationally are exposed to several different varieties of English--American, British, Canadian, Filipino, Indian, Singaporean, etc. Although they will want to know a great deal about other people and other cultures, they should remember that they can only be themselves. English is a means to communicate to the rest of the world their identity, culture, politics, religion, and "way of life." One doesn't need to become more Western or change one's morals to use English well in international situations. English can and should be de-nationalized. (cf. Lee, 1989).

It is often said that language and culture are inextricably tied together and I completely agree with that. But the implication has been that English is therefore inextricably tied to American culture or British culture or Australian culture or New Zealand culture or Canadian culture. When it is stated that way it seems ridiculous because we know there are many cultures in these countries and that any culture can use English as its vehicle.

Language and culture may be inextricably tied together but no one language is inextricably tied to any one culture, and no one needs to become more like native English speakers in order to use English well. For example Krishnaswamy and Aziz (1978) have pointed out, "The government of the

People's Democratic Republic of Yemen believes that English is an international language and learning English in necessary for contacts with other countries; the people realize that English is essential for trade, scientific studies, etc." According to Krishnaswamy and Aziz "materials from the English speaking world that are in use are meant to propagate the middle class style of life and Western ideologies." The feeling that these materials carry a chauvinistic attitude was not seen as grounds to reject the language but as grounds to change the content of the materials to "make English the vehicle of Yemni culture." One would hope that the rejection of foreign chauvinism will not be replaced by an indigenous variety.

Although I agree with Gumperz and Roberts (1978) that "there is no single method which people can acquire and no set of rules which they can simply put into practice" to ensure that they communicate effectively across cultures, I do think there are some guidelines which help. Below I've listed some to keep in mind when involved in cross-cultural communication. (cf. Mauser, 1977). I've divided them into two categories: one for the speaker and one for the listener.

When speaking remember:

1. Be yourself; remain natural. Don't speak louder than usual, exaggerate your enunciation, or use exaggerated gestures. Speak clearly and distinctly but don't slow your speech down excessively unless you speak uncommonly fast. Even if your listener speaks slowly, he will usually be able to understand any natural rate of speaking. If he doesn't he may request that you slow down.

2. Avoid slang, jargon, and figures of speech. Be as concrete as possible. Be specific and illustrate your points with examples when feasible.

3. Avoid long monologues and limit the number of ideas in each of your sentences.

4. Beware of trying to be humorous unless you know your listener and his culture well. You can be easily misunderstood and thought to be insulting.

5. Tactfully ask questions occasionally to determine whether or not your listener has comprehended your key points. Nodding the head does not necessarily mean that the listener has understood or agrees with you. A Japanese listener may nod his head to mean, "I am listening to you and trying to understand; please continue."

6. At the end of the discussion, paraphrase the essential items with a statement like, "The following points seem to have been made." (This is especially important for conference and business meetings.)

When listening, remember:

1. Relax and display calmness and patience. This is always important but is especially so when there are possible disagreements to be discussed.

2. If the speaker is talking too fast or too softly, request that he speak slower or louder. Try, "I'm sorry, I didn't quite understand you." Stop the speaker when you are unclear of a word or a sentence. Use something like, "Excuse me, but what was that last word?" or "I beg your pardon, I didn't get that last sentence."

3. Reassure the speaker that you are listening and understanding him from time to time by making one or two-word comments on key phrases: "Yes," "Exactly," "That's correct," are useful.

4. When the speaker seems to be momentarily pausing, seeking for a way to express his thoughts, wait for him; don't take the conversation lead away from him.

5. If you have heard a word or sentence clearly but are unsure of its meaning, try to simplify the sentence and ask, "Is that what you mean?"

6. Pay attention to silence. Sometimes what is NOT said is as important as what is stated. Always be aware of the way something is said--the tone of voice, the gesture used, and the intonation. These can be more important than the spoken word.

7. Even when you think you understand completely what has been said, check this periodically by rephrasing or repeating key ideas of the conversation. Don't be surprised, even in the best of circumstances, when misunderstanding occurs. Be ready to admit you have misunderstood or have been misunderstood and seek immediately to clarify the situation. It is the widespread use of English which makes it an international language. This does not mean, however, that soon everyone everywhere will be speaking English, wearing jeans, and dancing to a disco beat. The spread of English is not a homogenizing factor which causes cultural differences to disappear, but the use of English offers a medium to express and explain differences. There is no desire among members of the world community

when using English to become more like native speakers in their life style. Native speakers must realize that there are many valid varieties of English and that non-native speakers need not sound like or act like Americans, the British, or any other group of native speakers in order to be effective English users. English is being used as an international language in diplomacy, international trade, and tourism. Native speakers need as much help as non-natives when using English to interact internationally. There is no room for linguistic chauvinism.

Notes

*An earlier version of this paper appeared under the title 'English as an International Language No Room for Linguistic Chauvinism in Nagoya Gakuin Daigaku Roundtable, No. 3, 1981, pp. 27-32.

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